DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 354 456 CG 024 798

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TITLE Undergraduate Internships: Oxymoron or Necessity?
PUB DATE Aug 92
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychology Association (100th, Washington, DC, August 14-18, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; *Internship Programs; *Psychology; *Undergraduate Students; *Undergraduate Study

ABSTRACT

The undergraduate major in psychology has evolved in recent years. Traditionally, course work was designed to provide a sound preparation for graduate school. Practical experience was seen as the province of graduate education. However, research indicates that the vast majority of psychology majors do not attend graduate school. The undergraduate curriculum must address the needs of those who wish to major in the field but enter the work force upon graduation. Endicott College, a small women's institution, has designed a curriculum combining the liberal arts approach to psychology with extensive supervised work experience in the field. The curriculum also addresses the needs of students who major in psychology and intend to earn certification as teachers in elementary education and early childhood education. Over the course of four years, students do three one-month internships and one semester-long full-time internship. The last senior internship is supervised closely both by on-site supervisors and by designated Endicott faculty. The faculty conduct intensive seminars on a biweekly basis to process the experience and explore the literature on topics relevant to internship experiences. As expected, the internships facilitate job placement. An unexpected result is the increase in the percentage of students who decide to attend graduate school as a result of their exposure to the internship experience. With good advising, a sound curriculum, and proper supervision during internship, the undergraduate psychology major can be well prepared for work or for graduate school. (Author)

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ABSTRACT

The undergraduate major in psychology has evolved in recent years. Traditionally, course work was designed to provide a sound preparation for graduate school. Practical experience was seen as the province of graduate education. However, research indicates that the vast majority of psychology majors do not attend graduate school. The undergraduate curriculum must address the needs of those who wish to major in the field but enter the work force upon graduation.

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Undergraduate Internships: Oxymoron or Necessity?

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Background: The Evolution of the Undergraduate Curriculum

McGovern and associates (1991) have provided a succinct summary of the studies of undergraduate curricula since 1951, and presented their recommendations for the major in psychology. The differing interests and approaches to knowledge held by psychologists of various backgrounds provide constant dynamic interchange regarding the proper education of the undergraduate. Even with all the different emphases among institutions of higher education, work experience in the field was reserved for the graduate students. Many years ago the bachelor's degree in psychology was experimentally oriented, with the assumption that the psychology major was preparing for graduate school; as a liberal arts major, it was not to be considered as preparation for the work world. It was assumed that the person majoring in psychology would attend graduate school. Times have changed dramatically, and the curriculum has evolved just as dramatically.

Woods and Wilkinson (1987) note that fewer than a third of all psychology majors enter graduate school, and only 10% of these study psychology. Assuming that practical experience is appropriate only at the graduate level is not consistent with

the current student's educational and practical needs. It is evident that the undergraduate degree must prepare students for entry into the work force. Pincus and Korn (1973) examined the needs of employers and the consequences for the curriculum, and concluded that facility in personal relations was more important to employers than specific skills and theoretical knowledge. Practical experience in the work force is often the best way to develop interpersonal skills. Kimble (1984) refers to two different tracks advocated by academic psychologists, the liberal arts and the preprofessional. The latter track would focus on preparation for work in direct service settings upon earning the bachelor's degree; typical placements would be in personnel offices or in community mental health agencies. Since the percentage of students attending graduate school in psychology is so small, this option needs to be more available to students. The role of supervised practical experience in preparing students for the world of work cannot be underrated. Practical experience is becoming more common, and perhaps essential, for the undergraduate. Even within the traditional liberal arts approach, practica are now gaining widespread acceptance. McGovern et al. (1991) cite the need for an integrated senior-year project in an applied field setting or its equivalent as an essential component of a solid psychology major.

These trends bear testimony to the insight of researchers in the 1980's. McGovern et al. (1988) reported the need for pluralistic curriculum models based on the culture of the

institution, the student characteristics and expectations, and faculty values about liberal arts outcomes and professional preparation. Consideration of these three factors yields diverse curriculum models. Ross (1984) referred to the various goals and interests of psychology majors. Among his most striking conclusions are that psychology has assumed a service relationship to other occupations such as business and health careers, and that the professional emphasis in psychology would have a profound effect on the undergraduate program, away from the general experimental basis of the science of psychology and toward the practical application of the discipline.

The Undergraduate Internship: Endicott College

Endicott College was founded in 1939 as a two year college for women to prepare them entry into career fields with an associate's degree. The college has always offered the A.A. degree for those preparing for transfer into bachelor's programs, and liberal arts courses are integrated into the professionally - oriented degree programs. The main emphasis at the college, however, has been on professional programs with an A.S. in such fields as retailing, business, commercial art, interior design, nursing, early childhood education, hotel/restaurant management, travel/tourism, and radio/television. Specific programs have changed as the job market and women's roles expanded, but professional preparation has always been the focus of the institution.

In 1987 Endicott initiated baccalaureate degree programs. Profiting from the wealth of research cited earlier, we designed the curriculum for the psychology major in response to the needs of the students, the history and mission of the college, and the current standards in the field. The major combines a fairly traditional course sequence with extensive practical experience. Students are prepared for graduate school while becoming well prepared for entry into the work force if that is their choice. Given the statistics about postgraduate study presented by Woods and Wilkinson (1987) and the tradition of the college with its emphasis on professional education, the curriculum seemed sound.

McGovern et al. (1991) cite data documenting the dramatic shift toward psychology as a female-dominated major, with 69% of the bachelor's degrees awarded in 1987 going to women. Of the majors available to the students at this women's college, psychology is the most popular of the liberal arts options. Faculty are acutely sensitive to the needs of women in the classroom, striving to address the issues raised by Belenky et al. (1986) in the curriculum, the classroom, and advising situations. Since most women learn best through direct experience and personal interaction, the emphasis in our curriculum on work experience facilitates student learning and growth.

The college has adopted what is known as the "2 + 2" model. The student first earns her Associate's degree; then she

applies for admission to the second two years to earn her Bachelor's degree.

The Psychology major assumes a liberal arts background in the first two years; this is not a problem for traditional liberal arts majors, of course, but it does pose a challenge to students in professional programs such as Early Childhood Education, Paralegal studies, and Communications. These students typically have an impressive depth of study in their fields, as the Associate's program in professional majors is designed for job placement. Their orientation is pragmatic rather than theoretical. Some need a full year of additional study to fulfill the liberal arts requirements. Another challenge for these students is the shift from a practical, hands-on curriculum to a theoretical, research-based curriculum in the psychology major.

Internships

Our curriculum requires annual month-long internships during each academic year. Through these, our students are able to confirm their interest in their field and gain valuable experience early in their education. Each internship requires a journal, a paper, and two followup sessions with the faculty advisor. The internships are designed to meet the goals cited by McGovern et al. (1991), developing problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal skills, and a strong sense of responsibility. In the psychology major, students work in

social service settings, schools, homes for the retarded, drug treatment centers, etc. Even at the associate's level, students regularly report that their internships were a powerful formative influence on their career choice. These sojourns into the work world prepare the students well for the semester-long internship and seminars during their senior year.

During the fall semester of the fourth year, the students are required to do a full-time semester-long internship with two concurrent seminars, one taught by a Psychology professor, and one a separate interdisciplinary seminar which bridges the gap between liberal arts theory and the world of work in general.

The senior internship requires very specific learning objectives, on-site supervision by professional staff, supervision by college faculty, biweekly day-long seminars, and presentation of final papers/projects to the department at the beginning of the spring semester. These internships have included clinical placements at mental health centers with highly needy clients, rape crisis counseling and phone hotline work, industrial personnel and EAP programs, sheltered workshops for retarded adults, designing and conducting behavior modification programs in the elementary school setting, working with speech therapists, and assisting with special needs students.

The placements are obtained by the students themselves with the support of the Internship Office, and their excellent

performance on site attests to high motivation and adequate academic preparation. These placements would not surprise Boltuch et al. (1980), who concluded that undergraduate curricula should include an emphasis on human psychology. That this has always been the focus of most female students in the field is not surprising, given the interpersonal orientation of most women. Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982), Miller (1976), and Tannen (1990) have established that women value connection with others; indeed, connection and nurturance are central to the woman's identity. Working with people in a variety of helping roles has been a traditional career aspiration for women. The choice of the psychology major and learning about human psychology is a natural fit at a women's college.

One challenge we have faced in obtaining internship placements is the assumption that an Intern in psychology is a graduate student. The Internship Office makes the first contact with a desired site and gives an overall explanation of the internship program. Our students then go through the necessary steps to obtain the placement. They become adept at explaining their level of preparation, and the learning contracts guarantee that they will be given duties commensurate with their training. One interesting feature of our internship sequence (three one-month, and one semester-long) is that our senior interns are sometimes better prepared for internship than the master's interns sharing the same placement. The experience as a whole is entirely consistent with the educational needs of women, as cited by Belenky et al. (1986). Each student has reported that

she began to recognize and appreciate her knowledge and talents more through the internship experience than through any other factor in her college experience.

The Psychology Major and Teacher Certification

Students can design their major around three specific tracks, or minors: the traditional liberal arts; education; and public relations. Massachusetts, like many other states, has moved away from traditional teacher training programs. The rationale for this is that current graduates of Education programs are often lacking depth of knowledge in the subject areas they are expected to teach. They need more coursework in English, History, Math, Science, and the Social Sciences. In 1992, a new set of certification requirements takes effect in Massachusetts. Students must major in a liberal arts field, and take enough methods courses and field experience in education to gain the expertise they need to teach at their desired grade level.

Early Childhood Education has long been a strong major at Endicott. The college has fine lab schools for infant and toddler care, day care, early childhood (nursery) and kindergarten. Students who transfer into bachelor's programs often wish to earn certification in Elementary Education (grades 1-6). As the college achieved upward expansion into baccalaureate degrees, the logical step was to incorporate the needs of the education students.

Psychology and Education are closely allied fields. Indeed, some of the best known psychological studies have been in the field of learning. Our associate degree curriculum already provided that students take introductory coursework in psychology, sociology, and child development. The blend of the two majors for the bachelor's degree was a natural fit.

Students in the Psychology major with an Education concentration study upper division coursework in both psychology and education during their last two years. Their semester long internship combines their student teaching experience, supervised by the Education department faculty, and their psychology internship, supervised by the Psychology department faculty. The student teaching experience is a standard one, working with master teachers in the school system.

The psychology internship is separate from student teaching, and is designed by the student in conjunction with the faculty and school personnel for mutually desired goals. Internship projects vary: behavior modification to increase social skills in a socially isolated, acting-out child; work with students in bilingual classes; specific projects with learning disabled students; work with hearing impaired students. Any project that requires knowledge of psychology applied in the educational setting is acceptable. The cooperating teachers work with the student's Psychology faculty in supervising the

student's work. Students observe and experience the application of theory to practice on a daily basis.

Conclusion

The traditional liberal arts approach to psychology can be successfully combined with practical experience. The research of the last twenty years indicates that supervised work experience is a necessary component of the psychology major. Given the small percentage of psychology majors nationwide who attend graduate school, it is becoming imperative for colleges to provide access to the work world upon graduation. With good advising, a sound curriculum, and proper internship supervision, the undergraduate psychology major can be well prepared for work or for graduate school upon earning the bachelor's degree.

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